

TAKE PART!

**A Look At Trends In Leisure And Cultural Participation
Among Mississippi Residents**



MISSISSIPPI
ARTS
COMMISSION

A summary of research done for the
Mississippi Arts Commission by
Western States Arts Federation

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WESTAF



DeWitt Wallace-Reader's Digest Fund
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Introduction

From the Appalachian Foothills to the Gulf Coast, from the Delta to the Piney Woods, Mississippi presents a unique and fertile environment for artists and arts audiences. Since its inception in 1968, the Mississippi Arts Commission (MAC) has played a central role in the growth of the arts in a state where a proud and rich cultural heritage has taken firm root despite a history of economic and social challenges.

A number of critical questions confront the agency as it engages the new millennium: How can MAC begin to draft new strategies that will nourish the arts? Are there properties that make Mississippi audiences different from those in other communities? What cultural participation strategies are best suited to the special character of the arts and their audiences in Mississippi? While this report does not provide comprehensive answers to these questions, it does supply MAC with valuable information that brings the agency closer to such answers and provides insights that should inspire more effective decision making.

This report contains the results of initial statewide cultural participation research commissioned by MAC. The goal of

the research is to better understand the behavior of Mississippi residents in relation to their participation in cultural activities—specifically the arts. The research was conducted by an eight-member team organized by the Western States Arts Federation (WESTAF) and was supported through a grant to MAC from the Wallace-Reader’s Digest Funds—one of 13 such grants made to state arts agencies across the country. The purpose of the grants is to support multi-year START (State Arts Partnerships for Cultural Participation) initiatives designed to “...adopt new, more effective guidelines, programs and funding practices aimed at encouraging broader participation in the arts.”

This document is a summary version of a much larger report on file at the Mississippi Arts Commission. It provides highlights of key findings and observations that MAC staff believe will be of use to arts presenters across the state. This summary presents the reader with data gleaned from the administration of the following research tools:



- A statewide paper and pencil survey was mailed to a scientifically-selected, random sample of Mississippi residents. The survey collected information about the cultural participation patterns and practices of the respondents. The results of this survey are generalizable to the population of the entire state.
- “Lifestyle journals” were distributed to individuals in Yazoo City, Gulfport and Aberdeen. Follow-up focus group meetings were held with journal project participants to further explore their attitudes toward their use of leisure time and the arts. The journal research was designed to cross check the results of the paper and pencil surveys and to offer deeper insight into the cultural participation practices of selected Mississippians.
- A paper and pencil survey was distributed to avocational artists.¹ Administered to convenience samples across the state, the results of the survey provide pre-

- liminary insights into the cultural participation activities of Mississippi’s avocational artists.
- Focus group meetings were conducted with avocational artists in Oxford and Vicksburg. These meetings were designed to further explore the participation of these artists in fine² arts presentations.
- In addition, roundtable meetings were convened with arts and community leaders in Corinth, Winona, Philadelphia and Brookhaven. The purpose of these meetings was to secure information about the relationship of MAC to the field—particularly community and arts leaders in the field. Information gathered from these sessions was used to inform the development of recommendations for arts participation strategies and the development of guidelines for a new grants program (These meetings were convened for specific agency-related research and are not included in this summary).

1 Avocational artists generally are individuals who do not self-identify as full-time artists, or who do not see their work as artists as their primary career or professional identity.

2 In this document, the term “fine” refers to “high culture” arts and cultural events such as the opera, ballet, live theater, museums, or concerts in music halls.

Key Findings

The findings presented here signal the beginning of a new journey for MAC. Today's environment for arts participation presents particular challenges for those seeking to increase it. The challenges of scarce financial resources, diminished leisure time, and increased competition from all forms of commercial entertainment will not be easily overcome. The support from the Wallace-Reader's Digest Funds comes at a critical juncture in MAC's evolution. The findings of this research will help inform MAC as it makes choices leading to the goal of an even more vibrant cultural environment for all Mississippians.

The various research efforts resulted in a number of findings. Many of them echo research results reported in other studies across the country. Among the key findings are:

- The higher the level of arts-educational attainment, the more likely Mississippians are to participate in the fine arts.
- Location, affordability and the convenience-level of the times of arts activities strongly affect the decisions of Mississippians to attend cultural events.
- Families are important organizing structures in Mississippi, and the state's residents express a high interest in shaping cultural events so that families can participate together.
- Compared with other options for leisure-time use, Mississippians rank arts and culture quite low and are substantially more interested in sports and exercise as leisure activities.
- Long-time racial divisions are barriers to cultural participation in many parts of the state. For many Mississippians, the church is a major center of social and cultural as well as religious activity.
- For many Mississippians, the church is a major center of social and cultural as well as religious activity.
- Mississippi's avocational artists define themselves as supporters of the formal art forms related to their avocation.
- The state's avocational artists maintain participation in a vast web of organizations that service the interest they have in their arts avocation.

The Study as Part of a Larger Process

This study and the cultural participation work surrounding it do not stand in isolation. The work in Mississippi exists as part of a long-term multifold trend of interest in building cultural participation. The research presented here will add to the knowledge base of the field, and will provide insights that will further advance work on the topic of cultural participation.

The arts community has long explored the motivations of individuals who do and do not participate in the arts. The pragmatic thread of this interest is rooted in the need for arts organizations to fill seats. Other motivational threads range from a need to strategize the composition of future performing arts seasons, to a desire to know how to change the preferences of consumers of culture, to scholarly interest in theories of participation. As the field continues to search for knowledge about participation, it has become more sophisticated in its approach. For example, efforts dating from the 1970s and 1980s largely focused on attracting individuals to arts events through marketing-centered strategies. Today's participation-development strategies are far more complex. Increasingly, the strategies are rooted in knowledge obtained through psycho-social research that has been used to produce theoretical models of participation. As this inquiry into participation in the arts continues it can be expected to become more expansive—particularly as the competition for leisure time becomes ever more intense, as the variety of contemporary arts activities expands and morphs, and as the changing demographic composition of America brings different tastes in the arts and different patterns of participation in them to the field. For more information on the evolution of cultural participation research, please refer to the annotated bibliography at the end of this report.

Leisure Time and Choice in Mississippi

Mississippians live diverse and active lives, and their leisure time choices are driven in large part by family and friends. Mississippians favor sports and outdoor activities, such as hunting and fishing, as well as home-based hobbies, such as gardening and cooking. Although convenience factors, such as price, location and schedule are important, more important are the relationships with family and friends that feature prominently in leisure time allocation decisions.

In order to gather broad-based information that might inform the work of MAC in the area of arts participation, a statewide survey was conducted to gather information about the ways Mississippians make use of their leisure time. The ultimate goal of the study was to better understand the current leisure pursuits of Mississippi residents in order to pinpoint the activities with which cultural and artistic events must compete for the finite leisure time and money of citizens. In addition, the survey sought to gather information about the values Mississippi residents employ when selecting leisure time activities, the factors that affect their decision making



process related to leisure time choice, and the information that needs to be communicated about an event in order to make it competitive in leisure-time decision making. Administered during the months of September and October 2002, the mail survey was sent to a randomly-selected sample of Mississippi households. The survey results are intended to inform MAC about the content of activities that will attract audiences, as well as inform the design of marketing methods that might result in a higher rate of participation in arts and cultural activities.

Method

A random sample of Mississippi residents received a paper survey via direct mail. A total of 6,500 surveys were mailed between September and October 2002. A total of 481 surveys were completed and returned for a 7.5% response rate. The strength of the response was bolstered by an offer of incentives to respondents³. Respondents were selected based on an age criterion (all respondents were over 18 years old), and oversamples were used to assure that an adequate number of responses were obtained from African-Americans (self-described), residents of rural areas (based on residing in a city with fewer than 10,000 residents), and young Mississippians (18-34 years of age).



Findings

This section of the report identifies the most popular leisure options selected by Mississippians, discusses their attitudes toward arts and cultural events, and presents specific suggestions for engaging target audiences in greater depth.

Arts Educated Individuals View Fine Arts More Favorably

Two thirds of Mississippi residents (66%) reported participating in some formal arts education in a school setting. African-American respondents were somewhat less likely to have had school-based arts education (56%) as were rural residents (59%). Young people reported the highest rates of formal arts education experiences (74%).

³ Incentives were donated by local business and cultural groups. For example, free zoo passes or dinner for two at a restaurant chain were donated.

The lower rate of arts education among African-Americans and rural residents appears to be mostly a result of lower arts education rates among those over 35 years old. Indeed young African Americans reported higher rates of arts education than their counterparts (although still lower than the general population) indicating increasing rates of arts education in schools in the recent past.

Throughout this report “arts educated” will be used to refer to individuals who have participated in arts education at any point in their lives, including art, music, theatre, or dance in a school, private, or other setting.

In the survey, Mississippi residents were asked to characterize their attitudes toward fine arts and cultural activities. While few differences were found between the attitudes of African Americans, young people, or rural resi-

dents, Mississippi residents that are arts educated were less likely to exhibit negative attitudes toward fine arts and culture activities. (See table; statistically significant findings are noted in bold typeface and surrounded by a box. A statistically significant finding is one that, within a 95% confidence interval, is determined to be actually different from other findings, rather than simply a result of random error.) Arts educated individuals were less likely than others to find museums boring and/or intimidating, less likely to avoid symphony concerts, and less likely to favor movies over live theatre than the general population of Mississippi residents. Across the board, however, Mississippi residents reported enjoying educational activities that they also find entertaining, and did not generally report finding educational activities boring.

Table 1: Percent of Mississippi Residents Who Expressed the Following Attitudes Toward Fine Arts And Culture

	African American	Rural	Young (18-34)	Arts Educated*	All Respondents
"I enjoy educational activities that are also entertaining"	94	95	93	97	96
"I'd rather go to a movie than watch a live theater play"	51	45	51	(39)	44
"Symphony concerts are not for people like me"	41	39	37	(29)	35
"I think museums are boring"	26	24	24	(19)	23
"Educational activities are usually boring"	18	25	24	19	22
"I think museums are intimidating"	(24)	19	(23)	(13)	16

Source: WESTAF Mississippi Survey, 2002.

Number of Respondents: 481

*Arts educated means an individual with any formal arts education class at any time.

Key: ○ Indicates a statistically significant finding, which is one that, within a 95% confidence interval, is determined to be actually different from other findings, rather than simply a result of random error.

Table 2: Percent of Mississippi Residents Who Expressed the Following Attitudes Toward Arts and Culture "I would attend more cultural events such as museums, concerts and plays..."

	African American	Rural	Young (18-34)	Arts Educated*	All Respondents
"if they were more conveniently located"	(91)	88	88	84	85
"if they were more affordable"	(85)	74	83	78	77
"if I had more spare time"	64	70	75	72	70
"if they were scheduled at more convenient times"	66	62	68	66	64
"if my whole family would enjoy them"	59	(68)	70	62	63
"if my friends would come with me"	(37)	52	50	53	50
"if public transportation were more convenient"	(52)	(36)	33	28	31

Source: WESTAF Mississippi Survey, 2002.

Number of Respondents: 481

*Arts educated means an individual with any formal arts education class at any time.

Key: ○ Indicates a statistically significant finding, which is one that, within a 95% confidence interval, is determined to be actually different from other findings, rather than simply a result of random error.

The survey also addressed the extent to which logistical concerns hinder Mississippi residents from attending more cultural events such as museums, concerts and plays. Most Mississippians reported that they would attend more such events if they were more conveniently located and scheduled, more affordable, or if they had more spare time (see table below). Additionally, a majority would attend more such events if their family and, to a lesser extent, their friends, would attend as well. Public transportation was less of a concern to most Mississippians.

African Americans differed from the general population to some degree: They reported even higher sensitivity to convenient locations and the affordability of events. They also were more likely to desire better public transportation to events. However, they were less concerned with whether their friends would attend cultural events with them.

Younger Mississippians were more likely than their older counterparts to report having been a part of the production in an organized music concert, theatre production or dance concert at any time in their lives (58% versus 42%). These findings confirm earlier WESTAF research⁴

that suggests that young people want to be actively involved in an arts and cultural production, rather than audience members, and exhibit great potential as cultural participants when engaged on their own terms.

African Americans were significantly less likely than other ethnicities to report having been part of the production in an organized music concert, theatre production, or dance concert at any time in their lives, (39% versus 52%). Again, younger African Americans were far more likely (58%) than older African Americans (26%) to report such participation.

Top Leisure Activities Among Mississippi Residents

Sporting activities reign as a favorite activity. Outdoor sporting activities, such as hunting, fishing and camping, as well as playing and watching organized sports (basketball, hockey, etc.), are by far the most common leisure activities of Mississippians. One quarter (25%) of the Mississippians surveyed mentioned such activities first (unprompted) when asked about their favorite leisure activity.

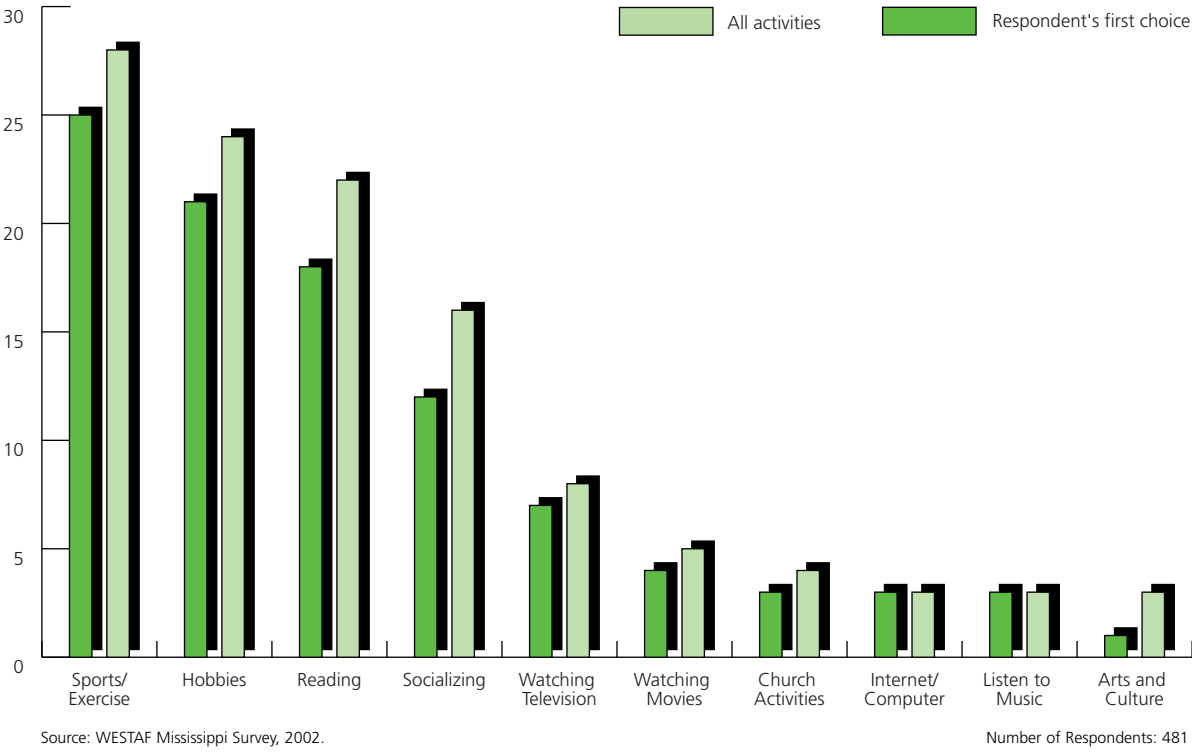
4 From *Nascar to Cirque du Soleil*, by WESTAF, published in 2000, and “On Their Own Terms,” by Erin Trapp, unpublished.

Hobbies around the home are almost as popular with Mississippians as sporting events. These include gardening, crafts and cooking. About one fifth of Mississippi residents cited hobbies as their favorite leisure activity. Reading books, magazines and newspapers were also popular, favored by 18% of the respondents. Young people were much less likely than older Mississippi residents to cite home-based hobbies and reading as their favorite leisure time activities.

Socializing with friends and family, including indoor games and activities, eating meals together, and going to bars and nightclubs were favored by 12% of Mississippians, and these activities were popular with all

sub-segments in the study. Watching television and watching movies (at home and at theatres) were popular with a small segment of Mississippians. Other leisure activities that were mentioned as the favorite among fewer than 5% of Mississippians included church activities, surfing the Internet and listening to music. While popular culture events often were favorites, more fine arts and culture events were rarely mentioned. For example, only 1% of Mississippians cited art museums and exhibits as their favorite activity (unprompted). Nevertheless, many of the favorite leisure activities of Mississippians have cultural elements, and indeed many fall under the umbrella of “popular culture.”

Chart 1: Leisure Choices of Mississippi Residents



Weekday Versus Weekend Leisure Choices

A second series of questions asked Mississippians to rank four different activities, in order of preference, that they might participate in on an average weekday evening and then asked them to create a separate ranked list for weekend activities. The ranking was sought to better understand differences in cultural preferences. Results indicate a strong preference for activities around the home during the week, but also a strong proclivity to select active, largely outdoor, activities on weekends.

First, participants were given the choice of watching television, attending live theatre, watching a movie at a theatre, and renting a movie on a typical weekday evening. In order to understand which of these activities is the most popular with residents, responses were assigned a proportional ranking. For example, a “first choice” answer is worth 4, a “second choice” is worth 3, “third choices” are worth 2, and last choices are worth 1. All of the ranked responses are summed for each activity, and a final score is obtained.

Using this procedure, watching television was by far the favorite among these weekday activities, with a score of 337. Watching television was selected first by 71% of residents, in equal proportions across all segments under study.

The second most popular weekday activity is renting a movie, with a score of 267. The third most popular choice is watching a movie in a theatre, with a score of 223, followed by attending a live play, with a score of 173. Attending live theatre was rated the fourth choice of weekday activities by almost two thirds of respondents (62%).

Respondents also were asked to rank five potential Saturday activities, including outdoor activities, watching television, outdoor festivals, reading and attending an art museum exhibition. Outdoor activi-

ties were the most common first choice, with a score of 258, followed closely by attending an outdoor festival with a score of 243. Watching television is the third highest ranked activity, with a score of 200, followed closely by reading, with a score of 196. Attending an exhibition is the least popular option, with a score of 106.

While fine arts activities, such as live theatre and art museum exhibits, ranked as the least popular weekday and weekend activities, many of the most popular activities contain elements of culture. Television, movies, outdoor festivals, and reading can be considered cultural or pop cultural. These results suggest that arts presenters in Mississippi should adopt a broad definition of culture, just as the state's residents do.



Cultural Participation During the Past Year

Although the weekday and weekend activities of Mississippians suggest that many types of arts and cultural events do not achieve “top-of-mind” status for Mississippians, strong rates of actual participation in selected cultural activities during the past 12 months are reported. Respondents were asked whether they had attended several types of local events during the past year. The results suggest that a large proportion of Mississippi residents do attend cultural activities despite low relative rates of education and income. Strong rates of arts education, as well as strong participation in performance activities may buttress these figures.

Music concerts were the most popular cultural events among Mississippians during the past 12 months, attended by 47% of Mississippians surveyed. African

Americans were less likely than others to have attended a concert (39%). The most popular types of concerts among attendees were religious music performances outside a church service (48% — and especially popular with residents over 35 and African Americans) followed by rock/popular music (34%) country music (23%), symphony orchestra (17%), and jazz performances (11%).

Also popular were museums and galleries, visited by 44% of Mississippians during the past year. Science museums were the most popular among museum attendees (49%), followed by art museums (40%), history museums (39%), children’s museums (23%), galleries (22%) and botanical gardens (21%).

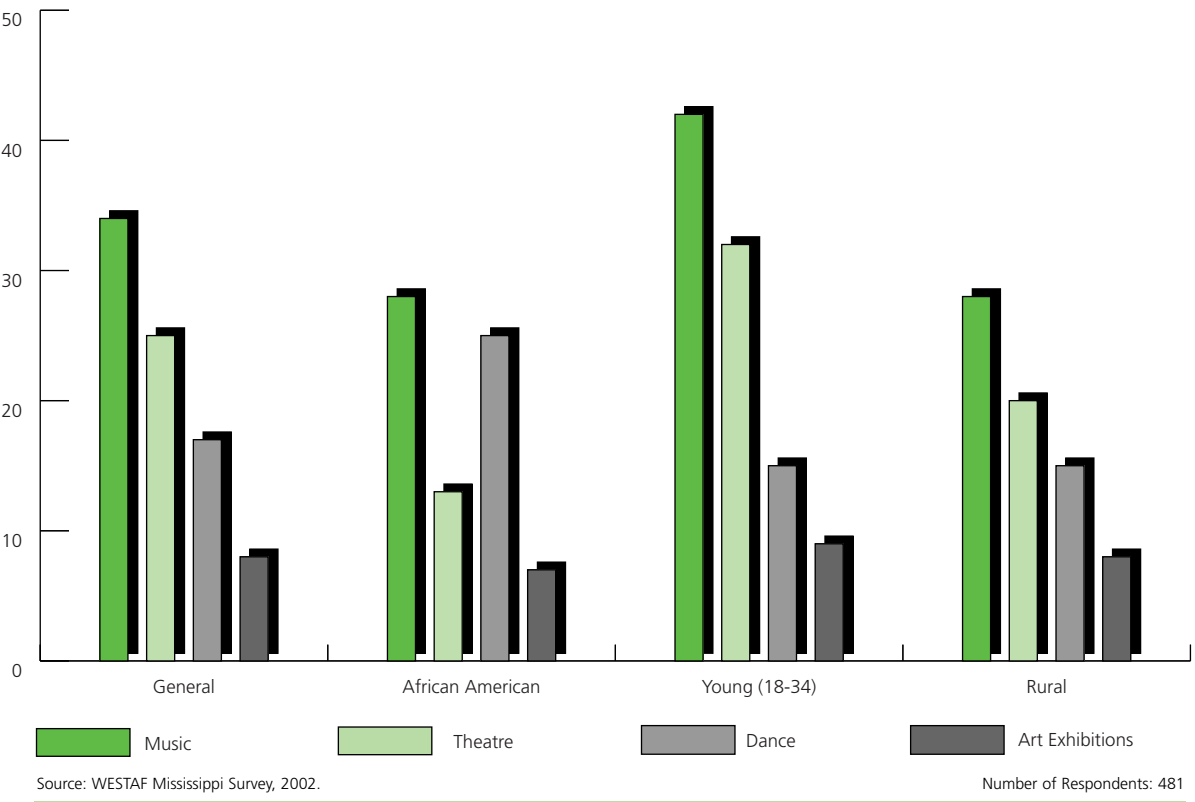
One third (36%) of Mississippi residents reported attending a theatre production in the past 12 months. African

Americans were significantly less likely to have attended the theatre than the general population, with 23% reporting such attendance, as were rural residents (28%). Plays and musicals were the most popular theatre forms attended.

Dance performances were attended by 21% of Mississippians, with ballet, tap, modern, and folk/country as the most popular (listed in order of decreasing popularity). African Americans were more likely than non-African Americans to have attended a dance performance.

In addition to attending cultural events, almost half (47%) of Mississippi residents reported actively participating as a member of some performing group or art show in such activities. Music performances were most commonly reported (34%), followed by theatre (25%), dance (17%), and participation in art exhibitions (8%).

Chart 2: Percentage of Each Population Segment Participating in Cultural Activities, by Discipline



Volunteering for cultural organizations long has been considered an important gauge of interest in such activities. Almost one sixth (14%) of Mississippians surveyed have volunteered for a cultural or civic organization or event. African Americans and rural residents were less likely to have volunteered (8% and 11%, respectively). The belief in the worthiness of the event (29%) and the involvement of a friend or family member (18%) were the most often cited reasons for volunteering in particular activities.

Leisure and Culture Activity Decision Factors

The concept of leisure has evolved during the past decade. The perception of less leisure time being available is rampant among Americans, and what leisure time is available often is fragmented. In addition, the “experience economy,”⁵ in which consumers seek out goods and services that offer memorable experiences, has placed a premium on participatory activities. As such activities become more readily available, consumers seek out those participatory activities that can be fully experienced conveniently and efficiently. The era of scheduling activities in large blocks in central locations is an outdated concept to many.

Mississippians were asked about the factors that inform their decisions about leisure activity, and the results suggest that they place a premium on fun, affordable, communal and convenient activities.

Across the board, when making leisure time decisions, Mississippians cited as important that the “activity is fun” and “the chance to relax,” with four in five residents ranking each as important (80%). These individuals are not willing to participate in an activity merely

because it is good for them, but seek entertaining activities in their leisure time. Furthermore, “the chance to relax” was an important decision factor for 57% of Mississippians surveyed. Lest the reader think that “relaxation” is synonymous with passive consumption, consider that outdoor recreational activities are considered relaxing by this active population.

Affordability also is of importance to most Mississippians, cited by 77% as important. Further, those surveyed attached almost as much importance to the affordability of the activity for friends and family (69%).

This research found that a large proportion (75%) of Mississippians have children. This means that the ability to participate with young children was important to three fourths (75%) of those surveyed, and the chance to participate with the whole family was judged important by 68% of the respondents. Equally important to those surveyed were convenience factors such as convenient scheduling (68%) and location close to home (64%). African Americans attributed greater importance to their ability to participate with young children (86%). Older residents ranked a location close to home with greater importance (70%).

Other principal decision factors highlighted the influence of friends and family members to the leisure patterns of Mississippians. These included the recommendation of a family member (65%), a church leader (48%), or a friend (41%). African Americans attributed greater importance to recommendations of family (75%) as well as church leaders (68%).

The criterion of the educational value of activities ranked lower, but was still important to those surveyed. Educational opportunities captured the interest of half of the respondents (54%), particularly the chance to learn more about one’s own culture (48%), and, to a lesser



⁵ The term “experience economy” was coined by Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore with their book, *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999). Pine and Gilmore argue that in contrast to the traditional notion of buying services or goods, when a consumer buys a service or good as an experience, he or she pays to spend time enjoying a series of memorable events that a company stages as in a theatrical play to engage the consumer in a personal way. They cite such examples as the Hard Rock Café and Disneyland -- businesses that cater to the consumer taste for experience and sensation.

extent, a different culture (38%). African Americans exhibited greater receptivity to educational opportunities than others (70%), as well as a stronger interest in learning more about their own culture (73%), and different cultures (55%).

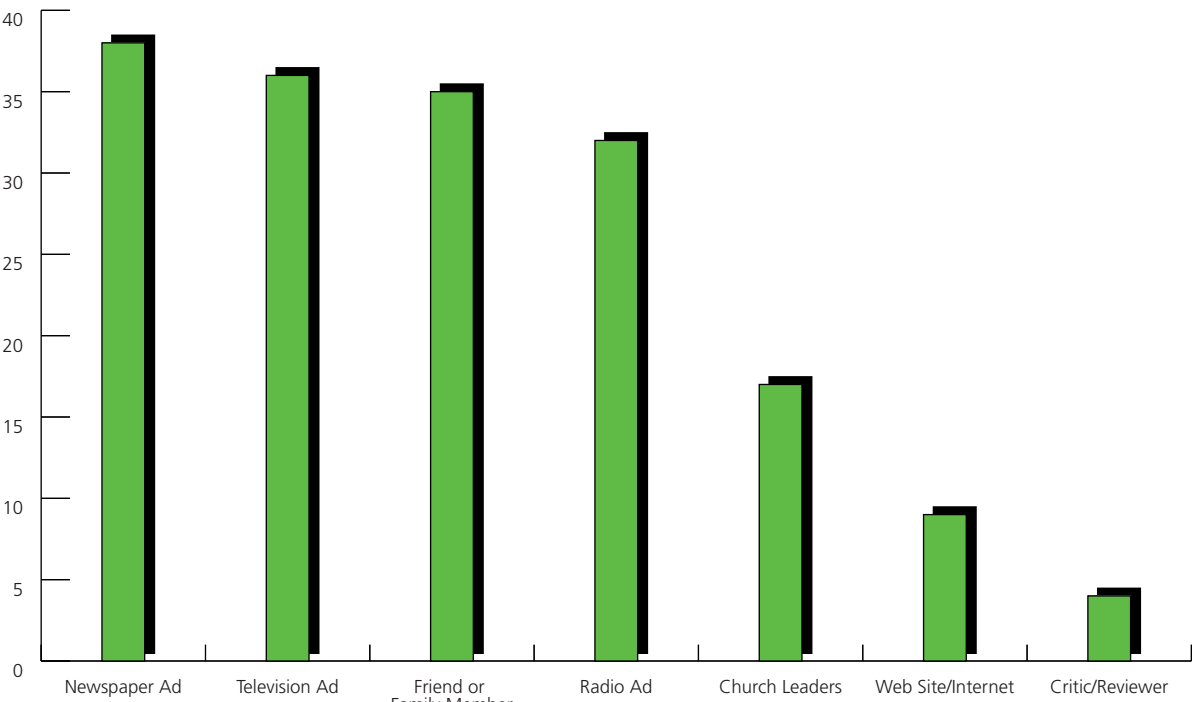
Marketing to Mississippi Residents

An important facet to this research was collecting data on how residents of Mississippi become aware of leisure activities. As part of the statewide survey, respondents were asked to cite sources of information about leisure activities that they used “often” or “sometimes.” Friends and family members (87%)

and church leaders (59%) were cited as sources used both “often” or “sometimes” by respondents in all population segments. Popular media sources, led by newspaper advertisements (86%), and television ads (83%), were common information sources, as were radio ads (79%). The Internet (32%) was less often cited, as was the recommendation of a critic or reviewer.

While the percentages reported above represent sources used both “often” and “sometimes,” the chart below only illustrates those sources used “often” by Mississippi residents, in order to report the most popular sources.

Chart 3: Percentage of Mississippi Residents Indicating That They Use the Following Sources of Leisure Activity Information “Often”.



Source: WESTAF Mississippi Survey, 2002.

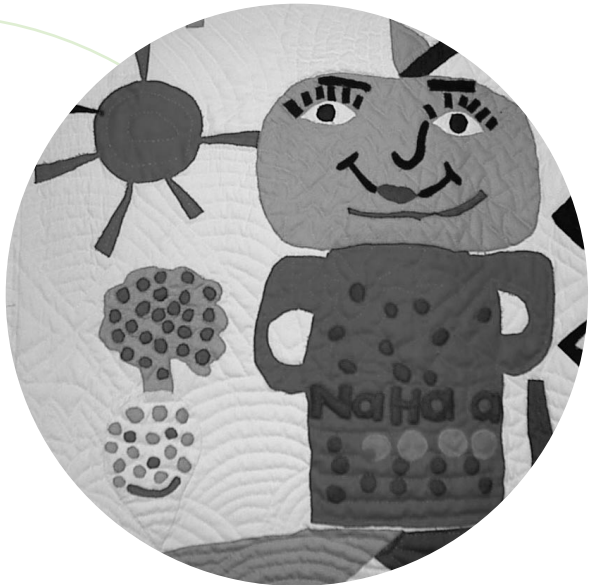
Number of Respondents: 481

Mississippi residents also were asked how informed they feel about cultural events in their area, and the majority do feel well informed. Young people, however, were less likely than others to feel well informed.

Despite feeling generally well informed, a majority of Mississippians also agreed that they often don’t hear about an event that they might have attended until it was already over. These somewhat contradictory findings suggest that there are gaps in Mississippi residents’ awareness of cultural events.

Summary of Statewide Survey Findings

Mississippi residents surveyed by WESTAF expressed an openness to participating in cultural activities, and they adopt a broad definition of culture. Family figures prominently in the lives of Mississippians, and cultural activities must be designed to facilitate communal participation. Attitudes toward cultural activities are strongly affected by arts education, and ongoing educational efforts should be supported in the interest of cultivating interest in culture. Participation in cultural activities is strong, and could be strengthened by addressing logistical and marketing concerns. Overall, Mississippians want fun and relaxing leisure activities, regardless of the form they come in. Cultural presenters must shape their programming and marketing efforts to meet the needs of this diverse and active population.



Additional Insights into Participation—the Lifestyle Journal

Recent research into the cultural participation patterns of Americans has identified a disconnect between intent to participate in cultural activities and actual participation rates (McCarthy, [A New Framework](#)). Reasons cited for this disconnect include: a lack of time or money, competing entertainment options, and convenience factors. This lifestyle journal study was undertaken to obtain a deeper understanding of the perceptual, practical, and experiential factors that influence the arts participation decisions of residents of three Mississippi communities. This project was not designed to yield quantifiable, projectable results, but rather to begin to build a better understanding of how and why Mississippi residents from several communities decide how to allocate finite leisure time and money. The results of this research provide a snapshot of the factors that affect residents' decisions to participate in the arts.

Method

Thirty-three people in three Mississippi communities—Aberdeen, Gulfport, and Yazoo City—were invited to complete lifestyle journals. They recorded the following in their lifestyle journals: their perceptions and attitudes about leisure time options, the individuals they preferred to spend leisure time with, and ways they heard about leisure time options. Each person who completed a lifestyle journal received \$55. Participants were given disposable cameras and asked to photograph the people with whom they engage in leisure activities and to include the pictures in their journal. They also were asked to collect media images that influenced their leisure activities and write notes in the journal that might further illuminate their leisure time decision making processes. At the conclusion of the journal exercise, participants in the three communities were convened in focus group meetings and asked to discuss the information they had gathered.⁶

Findings

The key findings present a profile of the leisure-time decision making processes and considerations of three groups of citizens from communities across Mississippi, and illuminate patterns that are expected to be found elsewhere in the population. Without further testing, the findings cannot be applied to the larger state population or its segments.

The Importance of Family

Family is the most important factor of leisure participation in the communities studied.

Respondents reported that family members, including parents, children, and extended family members, are the most heavily weighted influences on non-work/school activities. One respondent shared, "If

I were given \$50 to participate in any event or activity last week, I would have got together with my wife and son and found out what they would have liked to do and did that. I feel that this would be a generous thing to do for the two of them from me—a wish granted." Television watching is common, and this is perceived as a family activity that all can enjoy, rather than passive or solitary entertainment. Aspects of this finding include the following:

- Leisure activities typically take a back seat to family obligations. Respondents do not consider leisure activities to be a means of getting away from family, but rather as a mechanism for spending more time together with family.
- Respondents showed a preference for participating in an activity if it was something a close family member would enjoy.
- Young respondents tended to focus on the involvement of their friends in planning leisure activities.



- Study participants, particularly those in Gulfport, reported being overscheduled, with little time for leisure. Household chores, such as meal preparation, were reported as "family time."
- There is a clear division between respondents with children and those without children. For respondents with children, family-friendly activities top the leisure agenda, both in terms of content that is appropriate for children and prices that enable the whole family to participate. A respondent stated, "I would go to more art performances if the presenters would make tickets for families more affordable and offer more kid-friendly events."

Differences Between African-American and Non-African-American Respondents

There were clear differences between the perceptions of African-American respondents and other non-African-American respondents. Non-African-American participants' comments closely mirrored those of other non-African-American respondents in similar studies in other parts of the United States, particularly in the area of a perceived over-scheduling and the favoring of popular cultural activities.

African-American respondents expressed a desire for African-American-focused cultural activities. The respondents were attracted to events with recognizable stars, in particular, African-American stars. Many cited a wish to see "Stars Over Mississippi," which was hosted by Whoopi Goldberg. One respondent put the U.S. Open tennis tournament on her wish list because of a desire to see Venus and Serena Williams play.

African-American respondents noted perceived slights by presenters and marketers and indicated a preference for events and activities that specifically feature and target their community. Although respondents did not report overt racial segregation in cultural events, they did note that few events are specifically geared to African-Americans. When asked about the events that would

most interest these individuals, those that feature African-American culture and performers figure prominently. Respondents cited events such as "Three Mo' Tenors," in which African-American singers figure prominently, along with African-American fiction and musicians, and African-American headliners at the State Fair.

Religion and Time

Religious activities are a strong focus in African-American communities and considerable weekday and weekend time is spent on worship, Bible study, and church activities, such as the choir. Respondents reported making time for church activities in a way that they do not for entertainment activities. This suggests a unique reward received from participation in church activities, likely stemming from the community involvement, connectedness and spiritual nourishment the respondents find there. One participant shared, "Choir practice relaxes me. I enjoy learning about the Bible. Once I leave Bible class, I go home and ask my husband something—he disagrees—I show it to him in the Bible. So we're both in the learning process."

High Culture and Popular Entertainment

Residents in all communities rarely distinguished between "high culture" activities and popular entertainment. They did however express an almost universal distaste for opera, and to a lesser extent, classical music. The presence of national touring Broadway shows in some communities has created an awareness of national-level events, which are consumed alongside other cultural, religious and entertainment options without distinction in the mind of respondents. A participant stated, "If I were given \$50 to participate in any event or activity last weekend, I would have gone out to dinner with my daughter and then taken her to see *Stomp* at the Grand Casino. She is taking choir this year and I would like to expose her to different things."

⁶ Respondents in Gulfport did not participate in a focus group. The scheduled focus group was cancelled due to a hurricane threat. Respondents were instead interviewed by phone about their journals.

Awareness of Activities

Many Gulfport residents reported a gap in their knowledge of cultural activities; many stated that they only heard about activities after they had passed. A respondent shared, “I would go to more art performances if the presenters would advertise more. There are often opportunities that I am not aware of until after they have already happened.” The fact that these individuals also consume many information sources—including local and national newspapers, magazines and the Internet—suggests that the promotion that exists is not competing well with the large variety of marketing messages. These individuals live in an area dominated by big-ticket shows, and smaller events may get lost in the heavy promotion of these events.

Traditional means of marketing may be ineffective in small towns, as local newspapers may not publish daily. In addition, many of the African-Americans participating in the study read only media that are specifically targeted to their community.

Implications

These findings suggest a number of lessons and considerations that arts providers and others need to take into account when designing programs related to building or sustaining arts participation. While not a comprehensive list, the following suggestions could serve as a starting point for a robust field-wide discussion of the implications of the report findings.

- Events in these communities clearly must focus on inter-generational activities in order to satisfy the strong desire of residents to spend time with family. Leisure activities typically take a back seat to family obligations; respondents do not see leisure as a means of getting away from family, but rather as a way of spending time together.
- The state population contains a significant concentra-

tion of young adults with children, many of whom appear to share the interest expressed by older Mississippians in family-friendly activities. This large concentration of young families and young adults with children must be considered in the design of cultural programming that seeks to attract these individuals. The need to arrange childcare, along with the general interest in participating in cultural activities as a family, may prevent many of these young parents from participating in activities focused on adults. While the young people of Mississippi may hear about and be motivated to attend cultural activities at the same rates as youth around the country, Mississippi’s youth population may be more likely to choose to organize its participation in cultural programming around family activities.

- Respondents typically are moved to actually participate in an activity if it is something a close family member would enjoy. This means that marketing efforts must appeal to families.
- The interest in stars and special events means that presenters might want to focus on a small number of large events, rather than many smaller offerings. Although affordability is important to respondents, there appears to be some appetite for special events of this type with a slightly higher price, particularly if discounted or whole-family-prices are available.
- Given the focus on travel for culture in Yazoo City, large blockbuster events might satisfy the desire of respondents to view cultural activities as special occasions. Since many are accustomed to participating in such events elsewhere, they might be persuaded to attend at home if the draw is significant.
- Given the importance of church-related activities in the lives of participants, presenters might consider affiliations with local churches to bring related performers to these towns. Since price-sensitivity increases the desirability of discounts, presenters might partner with local churches to

offer special ticket prices to church members, which would both increase visibility and target specific audiences.

- Presenters should consider how to promote events through churches and local organizations, and word-of-mouth. The “buzz” in Gulfport tends to focus on large casino shows, and presenters need to find a way around these dominant events. In other towns with heavy competition from commercial entertainers, presenters have tried sharp and witty advertisements that play off of more well-known acts, or otherwise tried to relate their offerings to other well-known events.
- Presenters cannot assume that broad channels of communication will reach this audience. Respondents often feel slighted if not specifically included in the message. A long lead time might be necessary in order to spread the word. Effective communication channels might be established with local churches and community organizations, which figure prominently in the lives of the individuals who participated in the research study.

Summary of the Lifestyle Journal

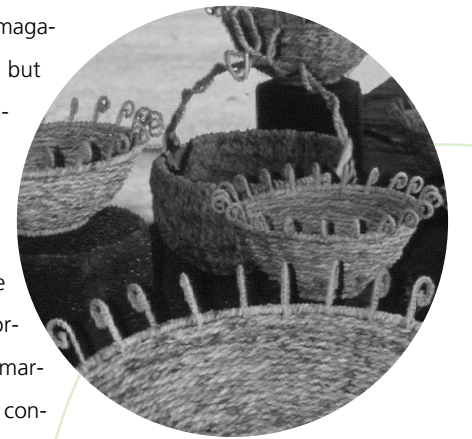
The results of this study clearly illustrate the importance of family and, to a somewhat lesser degree, religion, in the lives of the Mississippi residents studied. Clear differences were evident between African-American and white respondents. African-American respondents tended to more heavily emphasize church-related activities throughout the week than did white respondents. African Americans also perceived that certain cultural events are not targeted at African Americans and were attracted to activities that specifically address their culture and interests. White residents, who in this study were entirely urban residents, tended to emphasize family activities first, and cited a lack of available time as the primary reason for forgoing cultural or entertainment options.

In all communities, strong price sensitivity was evident, and a strong desire for family and/or group discounted

pricing to events was expressed. Additionally, in all three communities studied, respondents reported that local cultural marketing efforts are insufficient and often fail to reach them prior to events. Residents consume a great deal of media, including local and national newspapers and magazines, as well as television, but still cited a lack of information in making leisure choices. This suggests that marketing messages are failing to penetrate the great many sources of information consumed. Cross-marketing campaigns that are conducted through churches and local organizations might be the most effective means of marketing to these enthusiastic yet overburdened individuals.

Residents exhibited a degree of sophistication in discerning the “message” of many types of advertisements. Many individuals sense that their ethnicity, age group, or other characteristic is or is not being targeted by certain marketers. This indicates that disingenuous or superficial attempts to engage sub-groups will be met with cynicism and that presenters must make a substantive effort to address various cultures by altering the content of programs as well as the marketing efforts.

Overall, the Mississippi residents studied expressed a great deal of interest in many forms of culture, and cited inadequate time or money most often as reasons for not participating. A secondary theme was inappropriate environments, particularly in commercial venues, where smoking, drinking, and crude language might be expected. This finding is specific to the respondents surveyed for this report, and organizations should evaluate the sensibilities of their own communities when designing options.



Insights into Mississippi's Avocational Arts Community

Though difficult to define in absolute terms, avocational artists generally are individuals who do not self-identify as full-time artists, or who do not see their work as artists as their primary career or professional identity. Like all artists, they engage in the arts for the pleasure it brings them, their families, and communities. But unlike full-time or self-identified “career” artists, they engage in their art as a non-full-time enterprise that does not serve as their primary or sole means of support. The opposite of “avocational artist,” however, is not necessarily “professional artist.” Many avocational artists are professionally trained and have previously engaged in full-time art careers. Nor is the determination of “quality” a factor in drawing distinctions between avocational and full-time artists. Some avocational artists produce work of far greater quality than do full-time artists and many full-time artists who make a living in the arts are substantially less skilled than their avocational peers. The distinction between the two largely falls to who intends to make a living through the practice of a performing or visual art. This report details the findings of a survey of avocational artists—artists who may sometimes make money from their craft, but most often they have a “day job” and pursue their art for the pure love of creating it rather than for the financial rewards that the sale of it would bring.

This survey was undertaken in order to better understand the factors that influence the participation of avocational artists in the arts. It was not designed to yield quantifiable results that could be statistically projected to the entire state. Rather, the intention of the survey was to collect initial data that could serve as indicators of behavior and that would inform the construction of hypotheses that can later be tested.

Method

With the help of the Mississippi Arts Commission's program staff, a project team member procured mailing lists from seven local arts organizations whose membership base consisted largely of avocational artists. 1,181 surveys were distributed to the members of these seven local arts organizations throughout Mississippi between September 2002 and October 2002. In addition, 10 arts councils each received a batch of 25 surveys that they offered to distribute to members or to participants in special meetings. Individuals were allowed to self-identify as avocational artists; questionnaires were accepted from any individual who received one and claimed at least one arts or crafts pursuit. Of the 1,431 total surveys distributed, 285 were returned, for a response rate of 19%. As a supplement to the artists survey, focus group meetings were conducted in Oxford and Vicksburg, during which artists who completed the survey had an opportunity to elaborate on their responses.

Summary of Findings

This survey has two areas of findings. The first is a summary of findings related to avocational visual artists and the second is a summary of findings related to avocational performing artists. Because of the more robust response rate in the visual arts, there is more detail to draw upon when considering the implications of the findings. Response rates in the performing arts area were much more modest; subsequent surveying may be necessary in order to attain a base level of information that is similar in depth to that found in the visual arts.

The findings clearly demonstrate that a love of their art or craft is the primary motivator of most of the avocational artists surveyed. The words “love” and “passion” were used frequently to describe the experience of creating art, while the word “money” was seldom mentioned.

The results also strongly illustrate that participation in avocational arts and craft activities leads to a greater appreciation of arts and cultural activities in general. In addition, most of the artists surveyed reported significant arts-education in their backgrounds, which is reflected in their great appreciation of the art of others as well as their own. Finally, most reported ongoing training in their art or craft, from both formal and informal sources.

Many of those surveyed viewed their art or craft as an expression of Mississippi heritage or family tradition, and most expressed a desire to pass along their art to others, demonstrating their commitment to the art form that transcends financial motives. Through their strong commitment to teaching their arts and crafts to their own children and children in the community, they are cultivating the arts practitioners and participants of the future.

Avocational artists overwhelmingly believe that as practitioners of arts activities they are more likely to appreciate the cultural activities of others; 90% reported such a belief. Further, avocational artists expressed a belief that they attend more cultural activities and events than the average Mississippian; three of four artists indicated that they participate in the cultural activities of others to a greater extent because of their own arts participation.

This perceived connection between involvement in the arts as an avocational activity and the appreciation of and involvement in other arts activities should be studied further. Such research may help the field more thoroughly understand the dimensions of this connection, and would better inform work that seeks to increase the participation of avocational artists in fine arts activities.

Avocational artists sustain and are sustained by a wide variety of community organizations. This larger arts community context, which contains local, state and regional public

arts agencies, guilds, and national avocational art associations, appears to fulfill important social and community needs of these artists. In the survey responses, a wide variety of local, state, and national organizations were cited as playing a role in sustaining the avocational artists of Mississippi. The artists surveyed portray their practice as sustained by a larger community of artists like themselves, which fulfills important social and community needs.

Avocational artists clearly see a link between their participation in the arts and an interest in the arts of others. Efforts to recruit the participation of non-arts-practitioners to cultural activities might well emulate the experiences of these individuals by offering hands-on workshops and seminars that stimulate their interest by making their involvement in culture more direct and experiential.

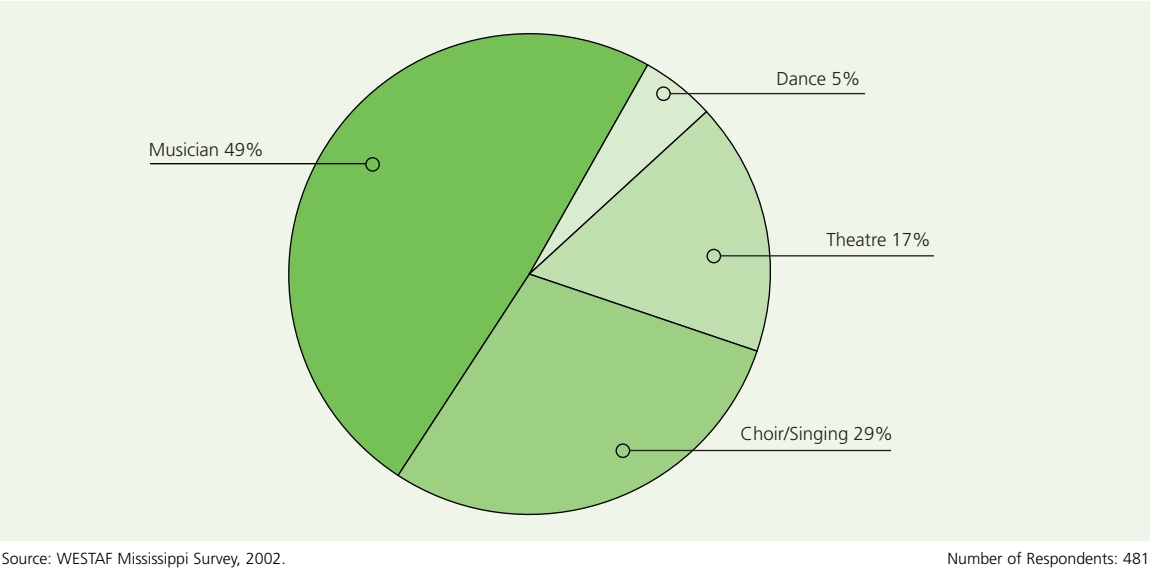
Variety of Pursuits

Avocational artists in Mississippi pursue a wide variety of fine arts, folk arts and craft activities. Most of the disciplines they describe are similar to the pursuits of full-time or “professional artists.”

Survey respondents were asked to describe their art or craft pursuits and were allowed to cite many activities. The most popular pursuits include visual arts, performing arts, sculpture, and fiber arts. Most visual artists surveyed are active in more than one visual arts medium or craft. The artists participating in this survey possess a high degree of formal training in their arts or crafts. While many are partially self-taught, most have received structured training through private lessons, professional workshops and in institutions of higher education.

Performing arts disciplines also are popular with the avocational artists studied. Musical activities, including playing musical instruments and singing, are the most commonly practiced forms of performance, followed by theatre and dance.

Chart 4: Performing Arts Pursuits of the Avocational Artists Surveyed



Overall, almost half (48%) of the avocational artists surveyed pursue more than one arts activity. Many of the individuals who reported pursuing performing arts activities also reported pursuing at least one visual arts activity, demonstrating the wide range and flexibility of avocational artists in Mississippi.

Training in Arts & Crafts

The Mississippi avocational artists surveyed learned their pursuits in a variety of ways. While most (61%) reported being self-taught to some degree, a similar proportion reported learning from teachers in a class setting (57%). (Multiple responses to this question mean that answers will sum to more than 100 %.) A small but significant minority (12%) reported that they learned their art or craft from a family member.

Two thirds (67%) of the avocational artists surveyed reported receiving formal training in their art or craft (Note: “Formal training” was not defined in the survey, and was open to interpretation by respondents). A significant number of artists reported completing a Bachelor of Fine Arts

(BFA) or another college-level degree in the arts (19%). An additional 11% reported receiving a Master of Fine Arts degree or having completed some graduate coursework. Others reported engaging in some university-level art coursework (18%) or having completed art classes in a non-university setting (20%). Outside of a classroom setting, avocational artists reported being trained through private lessons (10%), and workshops or seminars (13%). The survey sampling process may have prompted this rather high level of formal training in the arts. The survey’s self-selection process was highly linked to membership in an organization, and avocational artist members of such organizations may have higher levels of formal education. Another possible implication is that many artists who are formally trained in their craft may find it difficult or impossible to make a living solely selling their art and continue their pursuit as a hobby rather than as a career. This possibility is bolstered by another finding of this survey: a large proportion (71%) of the individuals surveyed expressed a desire for art to be their full-time career.

Arts education may be a predictor of participation in arts and culture activities. Exposure to arts education was strong among avocational artists, including in elementary (29%), middle school/junior high (30%), and high school (32%). This finding may be in conflict with the one third of avocational artists who strongly disagree that arts education germinated their interest in arts and culture.

Just as the surveyed individuals received training in their art, a large proportion (80%) have themselves taught others their art or craft. Teaching to family members represents a small proportion of all teaching; fewer than one-third have taught their own children (29%), and one quarter (25%) have taught other family members. However, almost three fourths (71%) have taught non-family members their art or craft, and only half of these people were paid for teaching.

Thus, formal training and arts education appears to be a significant component of the backgrounds of individuals engaged in avocational arts and crafts, and the majority of

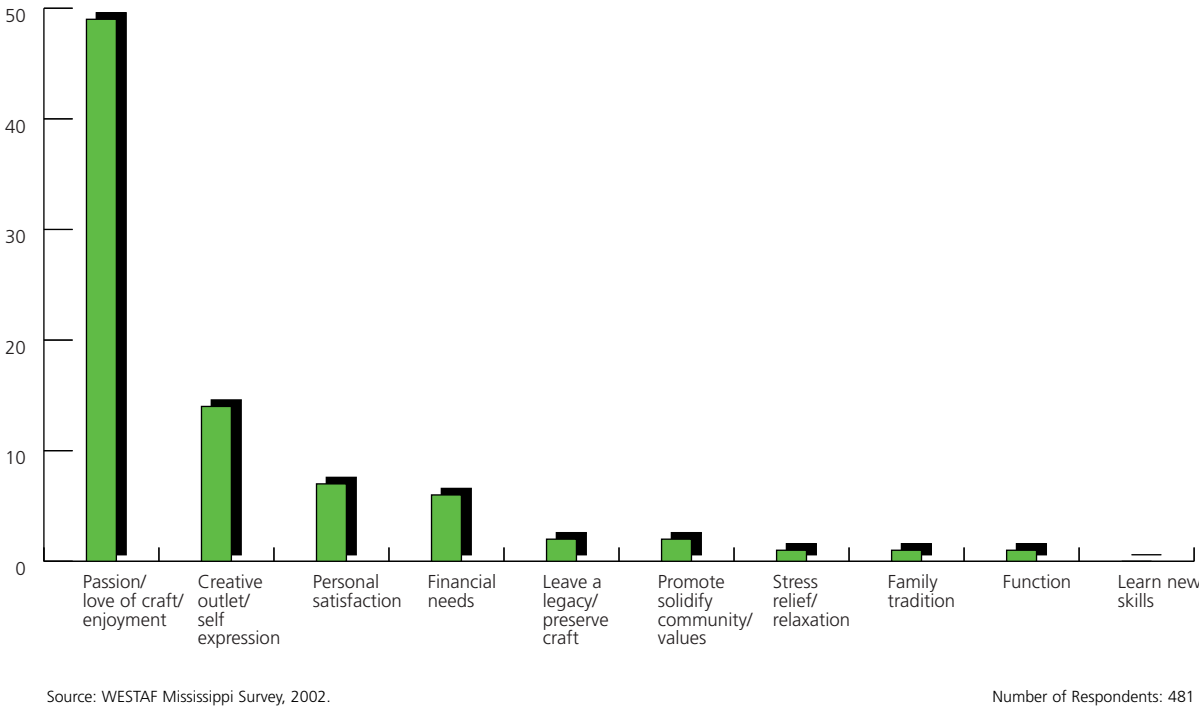
such individuals teach others, though not necessarily their family members.

Motivation to Participate in Art or Craft

The findings clearly demonstrate that a love of their art or craft motivates most of the avocational artists surveyed. The open-ended answers to this question include such things as, “Making art is as necessary to me as breathing,” “My art is my heart and soul,” and “I can’t imagine what I’d do without it.” The words “love” and “passion” were used frequently to express the motivation and need to create, while the word “money” was seldom mentioned.

The majority of Mississippi avocational artists surveyed (57%) reported passion, love, or enjoyment as their primary motivation to create. Another 14% report the need for creative expression, followed by 7% who reported personal satisfaction to be their primary motivation (see chart below).

Chart 5: Primary Motivation to Participate in an Art or Craft, Cited by Avocational Artists Surveyed



Attitudes Toward Arts & Culture

In their attitudes toward arts and culture—both their own and that of others—Mississippi avocational artists exhibit a love and appreciation for the arts. Most consider themselves artists and expressed a desire to pass on their art to others. Many viewed their art as an expression of their Mississippi heritage, and all considered their art as an important act of self-expression. The survey results indicate that participation in avocational arts and craft activities may lead to a greater appreciation of and participation in arts and cultural activities.

- A majority of respondents (75%) reported that they believe they attend more cultural activities and events than the average Mississippian, and a large majority (91%) believe that they appreciate other cultural activities more because of their involvement in their art or craft.
- Just over half (55%) said that one reason they pursue their art or craft is that it is a social activity, while 48% reported that their involvement is partially a means of supporting an organization or cause. A surprisingly low percentage (40%) indicated that arts education got them interested in their art or craft.
- The great majority (90%) consider themselves to be artists, most (74%) reported being able to cover their costs in pursuit of their art or craft, and most (71%) expressed a desire to pursue their art or craft on a full-time basis.
- Few pursue their art or craft as part of a family tradition (35%), but most (90%) expressed a desire to pass their art or craft on to others. A smaller majority (58%) indicated that they believe their art or craft is a part of Mississippi heritage.

Membership

The vast majority of avocational artists in this study maintained memberships in a large variety of local, state, regional and national arts-related organizations, including arts guilds and associations. The most popular organizations cited—The Craftsmen’s Guild of Mississippi and the Columbus Arts Council—may be a product of the sample. In addition, the group participated in a number of informal meetings related to making art.

This area will require further research because the survey was largely administered to artists who were on arts organization membership lists and those who participated in arts events; therefore, the results are likely to be self-referential. However, it can be stated with certainty that the avocational artists surveyed participate in a wide variety of organizations beyond those used in the sampling process. The fact that most belong to one or more groups indicates the social and communal nature of the activity and clearly supports the indication that avocational artists seek out others who pursue similar activities. Their purposes in doing so do not appear to be financial, but rather to find social and technical support and inspiration.

While most avocational artists participate in arts organizations, few have applied for grants or other funds to support their work. Fourteen percent of the avocational artists responding reported that, at some time, they have applied to the Mississippi Arts Commission to fund their art or craft. An even smaller segment of the sample (8%) reported having applied to another funding agency.

The Link Between Artist and Audience Member

The results of this survey clearly demonstrate that direct participation in an artistic pursuit leads to a fuller appreciation of the arts overall, as well as greater participation in the art of others. In short, avocational artists think of themselves as members of a larger community that includes other artists (professional and avocational), arts organizations, arts presenters, and arts educators.

- As previously reported, more than two-thirds of the avocational artists surveyed have formal training in the arts. Additionally, the large majority pursue training on an ongoing basis from formal and informal sources. The large expenditure of resources in time and money on training appears to solidify the link between the practitioner and the arts community.
- The vast majority (91%) expressed the belief that as practitioners of arts activities they are more likely to appreciate the cultural activities of others. In the case of avocational artists, it is clear that a direct connection to the craft helps to bridge the gap between the intention to participate in an activity with perceived value and actual participation in an event that requires energy, time and money.
- The avocational artists surveyed are extremely likely to involve their own children in cultural pursuits, as well as to train the children of others in such activities. Not only are these individuals more likely to support cultural events, they also are engaged in cultivating new generations of arts appreciators and cultural practitioners. The large exposure to arts education in early childhood of this group suggests that the children they train today will be the enthusiastic practitioners and consumers of culture in the future.
- Eight of ten of the avocational artists surveyed are involved in community arts and cultural organizations. These individuals are voting for culture with their feet, devoting time and energy to the development of a vital menu of cultural

offerings for all Mississippians. The fact that such organizations are so highly patronized by artists suggests that there exists a large population of non-arts practitioners who are potential participants in these organizations.

Lessons from avocational artists might suggest that engaging these individuals is best accomplished by involving them directly in arts and craft activities, through hands-on workshops and seminars that engage the gut reactions that so motivate existing avocational artists.

Summary of Avocational Artist Survey Findings

Mississippi’s avocational artists are devoted to the pursuit of their art or craft, and bring a large degree of formal training to their work. Indeed, levels of arts education may play a role in the degree to which avocational artists participate in structured arts. These individuals also play a strong role in the informal delivery of arts education to their communities. While many avocational artists would like to pursue art as a full-time career, all continue to make art in their spare time to express their passion to create and their desire to pass on their unique knowledge. In its avocational artists, Mississippi possesses a rich and generous well of talent that strengthens community and celebrates the state’s rich heritage.

The findings of this survey reinforce research conducted on the informal arts by The Chicago Center for Arts Policy. That report noted the valuable role the informal arts could play in the cultivation of arts participation in arts activities of all kinds. In addition, the report cited a number of advantages the informal arts bring to the arts field and to communities as a whole. While the WESTAF survey was limited to avocational artists who operate within the informal arts system, and thus had a narrower focus than the Chicago study, nothing found in the survey contradicts the Chicago study’s findings. Rather, the survey reinforced the fact that avocational artists bring strength to the overall arts field in Mississippi and their strength can be marshaled to benefit the broader field and the state as a whole.

Conclusion

Although the research completed for this report provides new information and some guidance for arts providers in the state in its work to increase participation in the arts, it does not provide a prescription or direct blueprint for action. The studies reported on here further document the growing diversity of choices the public is making

regarding leisure time activities, the factors in their lives that motivate such choices

and the fact that the formal arts and systems that deliver them

to the public are increasingly at the periphery of the

leisure time spectrum. The universe of leisure time

choices appears to be morphing at a faster rate than

the fine arts establishment can or cares to respond.

Changes in leisure options raise fundamental questions about the role of an arts provider in growing participation in the arts. Should it favor the formal arts in traditional presentational formats and move residents toward those traditions? Or should it engage the public's taste in non-traditional art forms and formats and work toward maximizing involvement in the arts in whatever form? Certainly, there is a middle ground, where the arts provider balances these two possible paths. These questions are further explored below.

Implicit in the established arts participation research is a focus on building participation in and enthusiasm for the programs of fine arts organizations (opera, ballet, symphony orchestras, museums, and the like). Many arts professionals view these organizations as society's core cultural vessels and perceive them to be the institutions that link creative and social communities across the country in a core cultural dialogue. They are important

and, until recently, have played that role. However, respondents to the statewide survey in Mississippi indicated only a modest level of interest in the offerings of such organizations. Should arts providers act as "missionary" organizations and focus on building the public's understanding and appreciation of art forms in which they do not now have an interest? Or is the role of an arts provider to provide opportunities for the public to participate in arts activities they deem enjoyable, fulfilling and important to themselves and their families? In Mississippi, the choice is difficult. Arts providers can tilt their participation support toward arts programs the public has not widely embraced, or they can expand investment in art forms and arts presentation formats that Mississippians already embrace and to which they want more access.

Who is the Client?

A key question when launching a new arts participation project should be: Who is the client? For years, state arts agencies and other arts funders across the country have stated that the public is their core client even as they focused on the development of an arts infrastructure and arts programming initiatives that were not entirely public friendly. The primary recipients of state arts agency funding are arts organizations. While the public is served by these arts organizations, the arts organizations are not always responsive to the interests of the public at large. Even a recently released strategic plan leaves the clear impression that Mississippi leans toward organizational and formal arts infrastructure support, not public responsiveness. Certainly, arts agencies use artists and arts organizations as means to serve the broader public, but an argument can be made that this long-standing approach largely has failed. After more than 30 years of state arts funding, participation has not increased significantly nationwide and, the commercial

arts aside, the arts do not appear to have become ingrained in the lives of everyday Americans in anywhere near the way that professional sports have become. One exception to this is the growing traffic at art museums. These organizations have been able to cater to the time-access demands of Americans (they are open many hours nearly every day, something performing arts venues cannot be). In addition, more than many formal arts areas, they have mastered the art of the audience-driving blockbuster exhibition.

For an arts provider to build cultural participation effectively, it may need to make the broad public—the same public to which the provider is immediately responsible—the primary focus of its efforts, not arts organizations. Consider the possibility that an arts organization could receive funds for a participation-building effort and incrementally increase the public's participation in its programming even as that organization ignores the arts programming interests of the majority of individuals in its community.



Through resource allocation, an arts provider can indicate its endorsement of arts priorities and influence the menu of arts offerings in a state. In this regard, arts providers face some large challenges—how to continue to build participation in formal art forms to which the public has not flocked and, at the same time, be responsive to the comments of the survey participants. This approach need not be an exercise in "either or." Formal arts, and especially "high culture" arts organizations, can be encouraged to be more creative, more inclusive and more attentive to the broader public when they design programs and present the arts.

Certainly, some of Mississippi's formal arts organizations are already taking this approach. However, all such organizations need to consider the broader public profiled in this report as part of their strategic vision, however uncomfortable or challenging that process might be.

Other Critical Issues in Building Participation: What Mississippians Really Want

In addition to the fundamental question about an art provider's focus and client base described above, there are several other critical issues related to building arts participation in Mississippi that must be considered prior to launching a new participation initiative. Though these issues may appear inflexible, they cannot be ignored.



The first critical issue stems from Mississippi's long history with issues of race. Although racial divisions exist throughout the United States, Mississippi's racial divide appears to be closer to the surface and imbued with stronger feeling and experience than in many other parts of the country. Mississippi's racial environment poses unique challenges to arts organizations seeking to build participation. Some residents told researchers they feel excluded from mainstream arts activities, and others related that they perceived their ethnic group's culture to be undervalued. Perhaps most important, many minorities queried for this report stated they found few spaces in the culture in which to initiate productive discussions about these and other related concerns. Arts administrators need to be realistic about the character and composition of this issue and adopt practices that explicitly address the racial landscape of the state in order to progress.

The architects of arts participation initiatives may wish to review race reconciliation and race dialogue initiatives across the country and identify those that might be adopted or adapted to serve the needs of arts participation work in Mississippi. Because church activities are so important to most Mississippians, adopting programs that involve churches and other religious institutions in the effort may be particularly fruitful. Houses of worship and religious institutions more generally serve as touchstones in society and often help people migrate to a higher plane of understanding about life and a more

complex appreciation of the temporal and spiritual realm—a function very similar to that of the arts.

The strong musical traditions of many religious institutions have been tapped as vehicles to help build understanding and participation in the arts in communities across the country. In St. Louis,

for example, the St. Louis Symphony's "In Unison" program

worked with African-American churches in a partnership that honored and supported the musical traditions of the area's African-American churches while building participation in the symphony. Similarly, in York, Pennsylvania, churches are being used as a place where racial divisions can be discussed and improved. In summer 2002, the Agape Project in York united fourteen families from four churches in a yearlong effort to bring together churchgoers of different races. There, too, music has been used as common ground.

"Families, mainly couples, either volunteered for the project or agreed to get involved at the suggestions of their pastors. Once they were paired with another couple of a different race, the new acquaintances agreed to contact each other bi-weekly and get together monthly for recreation, including workshop services, dinners, out of town trips, shopping, and cultural activities." (McMillan, A12).

A second critical issue in building participation is the frequently cited "affordability" factor. In the mainstream institutionalized arts, many art forms, such as symphonic and operatic performances, are costly to produce. As William J. Baumol and William Bowen pointed out over 30 years ago in *Performing Arts: The Economic Dilemma*, their now classic study of public funding of the arts, there are few ways to make many of these art forms less costly through the introduction of efficiency measures. As a result, the cost for many arts activities remains high, and they often require substantial public or private subsidy. Because the affordability of arts activities was one of the major factors cited by survey respondents as an impediment to participation, arts providers may wish to investigate ways to make quality arts events more affordable to the general public. This investigation would need to be based on the goal of finding ways to make high-quality arts events available at affordable prices, not necessarily a goal of identifying ways to sustain high-cost arts activities through significant public subsidy. A third critical issue emerging from this research is how to deal with the strong preference for family-based participation in



the arts. To respond to this interest, art providers may want to use the family itself as the core organizing principle for the design of many of the activities it supports in the state. Like the affordability issue, the family aspect of the arts may need to be reverse engineered. For example, the elements of family participation in the arts should be examined and art forms and art delivery systems may need to be constructed with those items as building blocks. Such an approach need not relegate all programming to what is now often negatively referred to as "family programming." Rather all arts events of high quality could be redesigned to make them more family friendly. This may mean presenting the arts in a different time or place and structuring arts programs in alignment with the family decision process about how to use leisure time rather than counter to it. Though often perceived as unfriendly to art, this approach can have artistic integrity. A family-centered focus simply requires that art producers and presenters break out of their current core organizational structures and place participation by families higher up on the ladder of priorities.



Summary: Next Steps

The challenges facing arts participation building in Mississippi are enormous—but they are no less so in other parts of the country. There is no doubt that participation in the arts can be increased; the only uncertainty is the question of the degree to which the arts community in Mississippi is willing to explore and embrace fundamental change in the manner in which the arts are formulated and presented to the public. The days are over when the arts can be held up as a societal "good"—a "good" that should be sought out even if not accessible to or enjoyed by a broad public. Today, leisure time alternatives are abundant and a new vocabulary of enjoyments and options makes the arts one of many options, rather than the ideal or preeminent option. To succeed in this new and more competitive environment, the arts must reflect on the core elements of their construction and delivery. Doing so will result not just in temporarily attracting additional participants to arts activities but will help build a fundamental appreciation of and consciousness for the arts into the lives of all Mississippians. Then, an arts participation initiative will have succeeded.



Arts Participation Annotated Bibliography

Note: Segments of the following annotations have been copied from Web descriptions of these items.

McCarthy, Kevin and Kimberly Jinnett. A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts. Santa Monica: RAND, 2001.

This work examines why people become involved in the arts, how arts organizations can influence their participation, and what lessons can be learned from leaders in the field. Researched by the RAND Corporation, the book also includes a chapter that presents an overview and critique of published research on arts participation.

McCarthy, Kevin F, Elizabeth H. Ondaatje, and Laura Zakaras. Guide to the Literature on Participation in the Arts. Santa Monica: RAND, 2001.

This report is an introduction to the literature on building participation in the arts. It contains analyses of the key contributions of the literature and provides lists of the most important books and articles on specific aspects of arts participation.

Peterson, Richard A., Pamela C. Hull, and Roger M. Kern. Age and Arts Participation. National Endowment for the Arts, Center for the Study of Public Policy. Research Division Report #42. Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2000.

The report presents two sets of analyses of the effect of age on adult arts participation in seven benchmark or core art forms. The data analyzed are taken from the National Endowment for the Arts’ Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts, which were conducted in 1982 and 1992.

Robinson, John P. Arts Participation in America: 1982-1992. National Endowment for the Arts, Center for the Study of Public Policy. Research Division Report #27. Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 1993.

This work analyzes two nationwide surveys of participation in the arts and found that participation or attendance rates for Baby Boomers at certain arts events were less than anticipated. The report suggests that Baby Boomers may be substituting televisions and other electronic art forms for attendance at live events.

National Endowment for the Arts. 12 Local Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts. Research Division Report #26. Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 1993.

This report details the results of surveys of public participation that were conducted in 12 communities. The surveys augmented the 1992 National Endowment for the Arts’ national survey of public participation in the arts (SPPA).

National Endowment for the Arts. Audience Development: An Examination of Selected Analysis and Prediction Techniques Applied to Symphony and Theatre Attendance in Four Southern Cities. Research Division Report #14. Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 1981.

This work examines the faults in the marketing strategies that have been applied to the problem of turning marginal arts attenders into regular patrons. It particularly underscores the importance of life style analysis in relation to arts attendance and identifies the pitfalls of standard promotional techniques.

Pettit, Becky. Resources for Studying Public Participation in the Arts: An Inventory and Review of Available Survey Data on North Americans’ Participation in and Attitudes Towards the Arts. Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies. Working Paper #2. New Jersey: Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies, 1997.

This study contains summaries, critical reviews, and access information for 25 studies of public participation in the arts as well as a chart enabling readers to identify surveys that contain particular combinations of variables.

Schuster, J. Mark. The Geography of Participation in the Arts and Culture. National Endowment for the Arts, Center for the Study of Public Policy. Research Division Report #41. Washington D.C.: National Endowment for the Arts, 2000.

This work explores the geographic variation in the participation of the American adults in arts and cultural activities. The analyses are based on the 1997 Survey of Public Participation in the Arts.

Tepper, Steven J. Making Sense of the Numbers: Estimating Arts Participation in America. Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies. Working Paper #4. New Jersey: Princeton University Center for Arts and Cultural Policy Studies, 1998.

This paper explores why estimates of arts participation in America diverge dramatically. It reviews two similar surveys—the General Social Survey (GSS) and the Survey of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA). Each produced different estimates of attendance at cultural venues.

Walker, Chris, Stephanie Scott-Melnik and Kay Sherwood. Reggae to Rachmaninoff: How and Why People Participate in Arts and Culture. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute. Draft version, May 17, 2002.

This Urban Institute study presents research that argues for a broad and unconventional definition of participation in the arts—a definition that encompasses a wide variety of cultural endeavors. In addition, the research provides information about why people participate in arts and cultural activities.

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